

The Labour Organiser

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MEMBERSHIP—

A review and prospects for 1942

A Glance Back

How many times have we written in the Labour Organiser about membership? And how many volumes would all we have written make?

We first wrote when individual membership was new and scarce; we saw membership at 1s. a year boom, and later flop. We were "in" at the birth of 1d. per membership; we saw that boom, and also flop in many places because we didn't know the snags, or how to keep members. When membership revived again in places, and the scores grew to hundreds, we still wrote, and watched, observed, studied, took notes, and passed on the hints. When four-figure Parties began to emerge, the "L.O." boomed them, examined the problems of both making and keeping members, likewise that of making membership, not a pannier, but a part, of a full-functioning machine.

Even as the years ran on the "L.O." has encouraged membership, dealt with every aspect of it—campaigns of all sorts, member-making of many kinds, collectorship, accounts (we brought out and sold many thousands of the present collector's book), visitation, arrears dealing, functioning and functions for, lapse rates, averages, charting, removals—all sorts of problems. We have dealt too, with lost membership, evacuation and war conditions.

And what now? How many Parties are there who in war-time watch the declining figures and say, Allah, it is Fate? For that is the question we are

going to deal with here; to deny the hands of fate, to challenge the ebbing waters, to show, or try to show, how a dam may be built, how we may retain the living springs, keep and make members despite forbidding and formidable obstacles.

Nor is the task we essay, or the job to do, one half so difficult as when in former days, we urged a movement prone to pennies and penury, to cheap Parties, to debt and dependence, to aim higher; to become a real Democratic Party, by bringing the many in; by being not of the multitude but *the* multitude themselves.

Over a Million Persons have been Party Members

Look back. It is safe to say that of the present adult population somewhere between a million and a million and a half have *at some time* been individual members of our Party. This achievement is something we are apt to overlook, and it has perhaps never before been noted. The figure approaches the high-water mark of reasonable achievement in permanent membership, and speaks volumes for the tremendous efforts put forward by Local Parties to *get* members.

But the other side of the picture is that we have never at one time even approached a membership of such a gigantic total. Our lapse rate has been a tragedy. Is it because we have never added tangible "benefits" as the Unions and Insurance Offices and

Friendly Societies have done? Is it because we have never properly learnt how to absorb and function our membership? Is it because Labour propaganda has not been sufficiently forceful, original or modern to impart the burning zeal that might have kept these myriads? Is it because there is no easy float from one Party to another, no real national membership that carries from Lands End to John o' Groats? All these factors and others need serious consideration to-day, for recruitment is only half the battle. Our losses are Eastern in their magnitude, and we are still losing.

No More Big Nets for Little Fishes

But we set out to give some hints on to-day's situation, on conditions made by the war. Membership has flopped once again and there are precious few local Parties in the country whose membership has increased in the last two years. Above we challenge the inevitability of this state of affairs and so it is up to us to make suggestions.

In other days when membership fell away we met the situation with a membership campaign. Membership campaigns, in fact, were always with us and we did not apply ourselves so much to recovering losses, and retaining what we had had before, as to seeking to break fresh ground with a fresh appeal to all and sundry. Campaigns were both local and national, or nationally assisted. We had great Membership Conferences sometimes mixed up with policy matters, and often concerning these we felt that the man who should be out catching the rabbit was encouraged to sit inside to quarrel with the chef as to how the dinner should be cooked. Conferences love to discuss points of policy, but they did not show the same eagerness about catching the rabbits.

And now these hefty methods are no longer with us. No longer, too, can there be huge literature distributions or gigantic nets to catch a few sprats. We are definitely forced back upon less spectacular methods although the latter are by no means less efficacious.

We profoundly believe that local Labour Parties to-day should on every possible occasion and by every possible means, appeal for members and make membership easy by every possible

means, by platform appeals, appeals on literature, appeals by newspaper advertisements, and above all, by keeping the name and address of the Party constantly before the people.

That we need, are anxious for, and will welcome members, should be the theme on every occasion that we approach the public or an individual. And we should take care to put our problem as to making and keeping members before our sister Movement.

In particular we think Trade Union branches should be circularised on this matter and the point made that our appeal is not only to active Trade Unionists, but to their wives and families. All these letters to Trade Union branches will not produce fruit or even get notice, but the process of following up which should not be neglected, i.e., the second letters and the third and the fourth asking for any results or any comments or reply. Each letter can express a telling point and the whole effect is to awake, in some places at any rate, an interest in the matter with the possibility of fruitful results.

Take the "Cuss" Out by Discussion

Every local Labour Party meeting should, in view of the seriousness of the position, now include in the agenda a report and discussion concerning membership. This will have the effect of sustaining interest and inducing members to look round for possibilities of recruitment. It is surprising how often one finds that there are members to be made in members' homes. Family membership, in fact, is something we have rather neglected.

There is an old and tried method suitable for non-delegate bodies whereby each member is incited to try and find another member by the next meeting. Our experience is that great results are not to be expected, but this method might at least be discussed as a means for bringing home to each member our desire and need to make up lost ground.

Notwithstanding that almost every party is depleted in workers, our lost membership will not be regained unless we do practice some of the pre-war methods which built up our strength before the war. Canvassing and visitations for members were practised at a

time when our strength in workers was less even than it is to-day. Every Party had its little beginning and with earnestness set out to extend its ranks. It will hardly be said that we are worse off to-day than when we had no members at all or only very few. We are apt only to look at our losses and to forget that rebuilt membership means rebuilt man and woman power within the Party.

Where we Lost Some

We are by no means satisfied with the efforts local parties have put out since the war in order to stem the tide of falling membership. Parties who have suffered a great deal from evacuation have, in the main, shown a noble spirit in adversity; it is in those areas which have benefitted by evacuation that failure has been most marked. We ought never to have lost so many members if adequate steps had been taken in reception areas. However, all this is spilt milk, and although much can yet be done we will confine our concluding remarks to another aspect of lost membership.

Almost every Party has lost members other than through evacuation or labour transference. Several causes have been at work which have depleted the ranks, and often the old members are still to be found at the old address. These people have simply drifted away because of the calls of war interest, because some of our own activities have flagged, or the activity that they themselves were principally interested in has disappeared.

How to Regain Some

An old and excellent method which was adopted on many occasions for getting members can be tried here. The names of ex-members can be written out on cards or slips of paper and sorted into their ward or local order for visitation by those in the districts. This method of dealing is really the same as that adopted on a polling day with modifications. The slips that are attended to are returned with comments after visitation, and those that cannot be dealt with are returned for treatment or special arrangement through the centre. A little special work of this kind for the purpose of seeing that the addresses of all past members are visited is worth

while. It is a humble and unspectacular sort of activity, but can hardly fail in bringing some back to the fold, besides which there is the opportunity it affords for approaching fresh persons.

In some places we have lost whole ward or polling district committees. The situation calls for some attempt to re-start in these places. It will sometimes be found that people who fell away in the early months of the war are surprised and glad to find the Movement still going.

Our article would be too long if we stayed to enumerate other methods by which the tide of falling membership could be turned. In these times, when Labour may be called upon to govern, or when it may, on the other hand, be sooner or later fighting against terrific odds, no sound Labour man or women should be satisfied with the present position. We believe that membership lost during the war can be largely recovered if we adopt sufficiently energetic measures. It is a matter not of faith alone, but of earnest endeavour—consistent, persistent, and pertinacious effort, carried through conscientiously and without fuss.

The Editor's morning post is invariably a bulky and varied one, but an unwonted perfume of *parfum violettes parma*, and *parfum rose*, and mixtures of several others, led one morning to a hasty search among the letters and to the surreptitious concealment of the all too sweet offender. Alas, 'twas not what was anticipated. Agent J. S. Price, of Cardiff East, had found a novelty, and with commendable promptitude had sent some samples on to tickle the editorial nose and send his notions wandering. The samples sent were really some enticing little invitations to join the Cardiff East Labour Party, printed on scented floral cards. They are simply sweet, and we shall hope to hear of overflowing women's sections down Cardiff way. However, we suggest the best way to get the invitations to the ladies might be to send them through the post to *husbands only*. Could women resist the temptation?

[From the "L.O." for September, 1921.]

YOUTH—

with some lessons for their elders

Absorbed with their own difficulties and problems, comparatively few Parties, it seems, stop to consider the appalling difficulties surrounding the maintenance to-day of League of Youth organisations. Despite the example of other countries, and the ghastliness of our own failure to contact youth in any numbers, lukewarmness is still the prevailing attitude with most Parties towards the problem of youth organisation. That word lukewarmness is hardly expressive enough: the frozen mitt is the commoner experience. At the present time we are reaping some of the fruits of our failure as a Party to bring youth over to us; we shall suffer still more in days to come, and suffer also for our further failure to do anything at all to attract or cater for the still younger ones, the children.

The above reflections come to us as we observe the L.P. Organisation Department's still continued efforts to keep alive what we have got left of Youth Organisation, and to help the scattered branches all they can. In fact, it should be plainly said that the strictures above written apply almost wholly to local parties in the country who have shown but precious little interest in enrolling young people and have never seriously settled down to the problem. It is time some of these did some real heart searching in this matter.

We note that the Party Organisation Department still keeps contact with all the remaining League of Youth branches, and the League of Youth Bulletin is still occasionally published. In the issue for December members of the League of Youth are asked for their ideas as to a leaflet for young people. The sender of the best draft will be awarded a book prize.

Among the places where League of Youth branches still flourish we may mention Kettering, Batley, Islington North, East Kirkby, Erdington, Blackley (Manchester), West Leeds, Guildford, Llanelli, Streatham, Port Talbot, Ilford and Southampton.

Some of the activities indulged in show up in vivid relief the tremendous enthusiasm, originality and energy that is latent in the Youth Movement. What the few are doing simply illustrates the almost inconceivable possibilities that would lie behind a really well-organised and numerically strong Movement.

We note that Kettering carries on a first-rate series of lectures. Batley has a plan for getting new members and is shortly giving a variety concert with their own dance band. Islington holds meetings for listening in to broadcasts, and the League of Youth meetings are open to Party members. The addresses of members in the Forces are kept displayed on a notice board so as to encourage continued contact.

East Kirkby has an attendance of over 50 members to each mid-week meeting, the average age being 17½. The meetings are various in form and have included "maiden speeches," "newspaper cuttings," "biographies," a "Brains Trust," discussion on "Why I came to the League," "A year of Science," by the League Secretary, and a cross-talk on general political terms, led by two of the older members. There is a dramatic section in this League and rambles are also a feature of their activities.

Erdington has a live series of Sunday afternoon meetings, and these have taken up many vital questions. Blackley has 30 members (average age 17) and they have outlined a really energetic programme. West Leeds League of Youth reports an increase in membership. They have had a "spelling bee," "five-minute speeches," not to mention a "Brains Trust," to liven up their meetings. This League has a camp fund and is active in camping.

Guildford will be holding a Christmas Party. The League has its own little paper called "Young Guildford," with a circulation of 200. Hikes and river trips form a part of the activities plus a party at Christmas. There are really two sections.

(Concluded on Page 10.)

Opportunities and Ideas for Making Members

(See also pages 8 and 9)

Some of the methods by which individual membership may be steadily increased are illustrated on another page of this issue, where a series of stock letters are given. It will be noted that these letters are framed for various purposes and for various persons. Speaking of the first letter, we have known live secretaries who kept a lookout for persons who came into prominence through mention in the local newspapers, or whose names otherwise came before them, and so afforded an excuse for sending an invitation to join the Party. Such excuses are many and various, the method being that of selective canvass. There will, of course, be many disappointments and contact sometimes with exceptional and "difficult" people. But this plan gives good returns and some of the members made pay good subscriptions. There is not a great deal of labour involved in sending these letters (which are not likely to be more than three or four a week) and the method does result in slow and steady recruitment of a good class of members.

The letter, of course, is merely given as an example and might be varied in accordance with special or local circumstances.

A method adopted by a local Party for making members which came under our observation some time ago is worthy of imitation. This Party decided that they had no time or strength for a big systematic canvass. They, however, decided upon what seemed a very moderate effort, viz., to canvass five houses every night, or to average up that number in a week. We recollect that the result was astonishing, and though members were not made every day, there was a steady flow of new members every week.

Now don't let anyone jump to the conclusion that what this Party essayed was an easy task. It was not; for to canvass five houses, and do the job thoroughly, really means not five interviews, but invariably several more, with

other occupants and members' families. Many people go wrong in canvassing by interviewing only the person who answers the door and failing to enquire about others. Moreover, there are nights where canvassing cannot be done for one reason or another, and on occasions, even with five houses only to canvass, one or two long interviews may take up all the best canvassing time; on some nights, too, there will be the previous night's arrears to be caught up. In addition to this there is time taken in mutual consultation among the workers doing the job, in comparing returns and in doing what is needful regarding new members.

A small Party undertaking a canvass on the above lines should therefore take the last-mentioned matters into consideration. It is unwise to begin on too big a scale and a small Party which intends to canvass an average of only *two* houses a night will accomplish quite a respectable work in a few weeks. One must remember that as new entrants come in the number of meetings and other Party activities may grow.

A secretary whom we knew a few years ago had a regular habit of calling upon all the Trade Union secretaries in his constituency. We believe he only visited them about twice a year, but made a point of not missing one, and of acquainting the secretaries of the fact that they could expect a call from him a couple of times at any rate during the year. His greeting generally was "Well, here I am again. It is six months since I called and I have come to have another chat about things." It was surprising how well he got along with the Trade Union branches as a consequence, and what a world of understanding of mutual problems there was. This method has possibilities at a time like the present, when Labour is more than ever anxious for closer working with the Unions and when the Unions should be sharing a greater share of their prosperity with the political movement.

If the Trade Union secretaries understand our need for membership, the rank and file of the branches will be infiltrated by the same idea. In the past we have often advised letters to Trade Unions on this subject. Here is a direct method of enlisting the Trade Union secretaries themselves, and we advise its adoption.

The Party notice board (where there is one) is often a drab and strictly utilitarian affair without much to enliven it. Where the board is in a club entrance or in the entrance to Party premises, it usually carries no more than strictly business announcements though where the boards are large enough Party placards sometimes appear.

We remember two good announcements which appeared on boards which seemed to us to excel and to have a direct influence on making members. These are illustrated below.

No 1

You may join the Labour Party as an individual member.

Minimum subscription, only One Penny per week.

See us any night in Room 5 upstairs at 6 to 7.30 p.m.

No. 2 (displayed outside)

The — Labour Party invites you to join the Party as an Individual Member.

Join us and share in our pleasures and in our great work of Social Reconstruction.

The subscription is a minimum of only 1d. per week. Come right in.

You may see the Secretary any night in Room 5 (upstairs) at 6 to 7.30 p.m.

Two or three years ago when many Parties were furbishing up their ideas on publicity, and big endeavours were being made to make members, we saw one or two good letters in the press which made mention of Party member-

ship and facilities for joining the Party. The press, of course, do not usually fall for direct invitations of this kind, but the letters we saw were somewhat artfully conceived epistles which took up one or other of the current problems in the public mind, and led on to pointing out how Labour was taking up these problems, and how, through its ranks of individual members, means were afforded for studying question of public policy, and for taking part in its work. Membership was, in short, given a news value, and so the letters got inserted. Any parties who think they can utilise their local press in this way should always remember that the letter which gets inserted is that which has an air of originality or contains some point of unusual interest. On more than one occasion local Parties have got quite excellent publicity for their membership-making efforts. This is not so certain at the present period, however; there is real news value in the fact that the Labour Party, even during the war, seeks to maintain its membership, to contact with evacuees and to give a wide section of the public the opportunity to collaborate in the discussion of and approach to post-war problems.

Parties who conduct Advice Bureaux often give to the public a tremendous amount of gratis service. We know it is a common thing to point out at interviews the benefits both of Trade Union membership and of Party membership, but the interviewer often hesitates to press the point home out of sheer delicacy and to a disinclination to seem to take advantage of the distress or difficulty of the applicant. It seems to us that where this is the case no objection can be taken to sending suitably-framed letters to each applicant for help pointing out how we would welcome him or her in the ranks of Party members. A letter along these lines might be delivered by hand and followed up by a visit. This method ought to be productive at least in the many cases where applicants are not of the down and out order and make use of the services of the Party without properly understanding that there is a means by which they could contribute to the upkeep of same.

We think more use might be made of this method of inviting and boosting individual membership.

THE 1942 MEMBERS' REGISTER

With the New Year all members' subscriptions become due again and every individual member must, on payment of the full or part of his subscriptions, be supplied with his card for this year.

In all well-conducted parties the Members' Register is an important part of the parties equipment, and indeed, it is difficult to know how a party could be properly carried on without a proper Members' Register and record. In the best parties elaborate card index systems or book devices are in use. It is to those others we wish to offer some advice.

In the case of a Divisional Party in a county division there is an obligation to obtain cards and to issue them, with every possible encouragement for their extended use, among the local Labour parties and polling district committees. It is the latter parties who issue the cards except for a few that may be issued in unorganised districts by the D.L.P. itself. It therefore follows that each of these bodies should keep a Register of members. Untold advantages arise from the introduction of a system by which all entries in the local Registers are copied and sent to the centre so that the D.L.P. always possesses a complete list of members in the Division.

In a Borough Division the process of enrolment of members mostly takes place through the ward committees, and each of these bodies should keep a Register. The D.L.P. (whether in a divided borough or no) has, in our opinion, an even greater responsibility than the county D.L.P. for also keeping a complete Register of members.

We have seen several excellent systems in vogue for the keeping of Registers. One of these was a card double the usual record card size (and therefore 7 x 5 inches), perforated down the centre. The local secretary would fill this in in duplicate, keeping one copy for his own card index, and sending the other one to the centre.

We do not advise in wartime the introduction of elaborate systems which make demands on paper or card which

the stationer or printer finds difficult to meet.

It is better, perhaps, in these times that the smaller parties, at any rate, and all those without big memberships, should keep the Register in book form and seeing that every member's name is properly entered together with any subsequent change of address. The book could be of ordinary exercise book size but with not more than five names on a page. An index book is even better, or another variation is to have a page or so for each street or local district.

While it is the local secretary's duty to send on the names of members to the centre, it is good policy that the centre should devise means for this to be done, and to supply forms on which names can be sent in. A few duplicated sheets supplied to each local secretary are sufficient for this purpose, but it is important to have a definite time or period when these forms should be returned—a monthly return seems to us to be best. This certainly is preferable to leaving it to local secretaries to send lists in occasionally—a blank return ought to be sent on any month when no members have been enrolled.

We trust that the above few simple hints will lead to an improvement in present methods. There are many improvements on the simple things we have advocated, for we have only stated what we believe to be the minimum of common-sense record keeping.

POLITICAL AGENT

The London Co-operative Society, Ltd., Political Committee, invite applications for the position of full-time Agent for a London Constituency. Salary—National Scale.

Knowledge of the Co-operative Movement essential.

Apply, stating age, qualifications, experience, etc., together with two references, not later than 17th January, 1942, to—

"AGENT"

L.C.S. Political Committee,
Pioneer House,
348-350 Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1

THESE LETTERS WILL HELP

Letter for Particular Prospects

DEAR SIR,

I have noted your letter in the "Rempster Times" and I need hardly assure you that the sentiments therein expressed find sympathy in Labour Party ranks.

Or

I have noted that you have recently been appointed Headmaster to the Rempster Council Schools.

Or

Your sympathy with democratic causes recently, and so well, expressed, at the public meeting at Rempster Schools prompts me to write you concerning membership of the Labour Party.

Or

Your name has been brought to my notice as one in sympathy with Labour aspirations and I am venturing, therefore, to write you regarding membership of the Labour Party.

Follow on.

Enclosed is a leaflet (or literature) which throws some little light on the aims and aspirations of the above Party. This Party is, of course, a branch of the great British Labour Party in whose doings and aims you will be deeply interested.

The developments of recent years, and particularly since the war, have removed many misconceptions regarding Labour's policy and our general outlook on matters of both immediate and ultimate concern. In 1942 it is not necessary for the Labour Party to defend itself against charges which were common not so many years ago, for this great Movement is not only now trusted by the overwhelming mass of British people, but it has been tried and it is understood.

In these times, and in preparation for the great work of Reconstruction after the war, we are particularly anxious to enrol in our ranks all those whose sympathies are with us, for in this way individual effort can be increased and made effective. Further, association with us as a member of the Party increases one's knowledge and hold upon the practical problems of the day. We therefore extend to you a hearty invitation to become a member.

The subscription to our Party is 4s. 4d. per year. It is on such a trifling sum as this that the great power and influence of the Labour Party has been built.

We should appreciate a reply to this letter, and any further information you may desire will be gladly given.

Yours sincerely,

A. BRAINWORKER,
Secretary.

Letter to an Evacuee

DEAR SIR (or Madam),

We understand you are a temporary resident in Rempster due to the unfortunate incidence of enemy action.

Many evacuees have been members of the Labour Party in their home towns and we are anxious to get in touch with all these at once. If you were a former member of the Labour Party we should feel most grateful if you will fill in the slip at foot hereof and return by hand, or post immediately to the undersigned, who will at once get in touch with you.

If you have not been a member of the Labour Party we want to extend a hearty invitation to you to join our ranks. This great Party, whose growth and accomplishments and policy are surely now well understood, is a combination of people who are bent on achieving far-reaching changes in our social and economic system so that there may be established in our country fuller justice for the worker and a better order for all the people.

Already the Labour Party is looking forward to the great period of Reconstruction into which we must enter after the war. We claim to be the largest and most representative Party in the State and to be guided by the highest principles of social justice and devotion to our country.

We cannot in this letter further enlarge upon that matter, but if you are in sympathy with our aims we trust you will join our ranks as an individual member and so come closer in contact, and even share in our work and endeavours.

A cordial welcome awaits you and if you will fill up the application form to be found on enclosed leaflet, you will

receive a visit from a Party member immediately.

The great Labour Party has been built up on the strength and pence of the people themselves and you ought to be in this Movement.

Yours sincerely,

A. BRAINWORKER,
Secretary.

(Suitable form at foot.)

Letter to a Trade Union Secretary

DEAR SIR AND BROTHER,

There was probably no time in the history of the working classes of this country when it was more necessary than to-day for the industrial and political wings of our Movement to combine their efforts, and to strain every nerve to secure social justice in the period of Reconstruction which now lies ahead.

We conceive it to be the duty of every member of the Labour Party to assist Trade Unionism in all its aspirations and endeavours. In the same way we conceive it to be right that Trade Union branches should themselves be desperately concerned to secure the strength and prosperity of the local Labour Party. There are two ways in which we suggest your branch can assist in this. These are:—

- 1.—By strengthening your present affiliation if that is at all possible.
- 2.—By responding to our suggestions below concerning individual membership of the Labour Party.

This Party is financed both by Trade Union affiliations and by the subscriptions of individual members, and it is the latter who mostly carry out the day to day work connected with Ward organisation and other local party activities.

We are particularly anxious that your branch should endeavour to help us by encouraging its members to join the local party as individual members, and if you can supply us with a list of members who promise to join us or who are likely to do so, we will arrange that such persons are immediately visited.

We would further like to point out that in the homes of Trade Unionists generally, there are actually millions of people (wives and young sons and

daughters), who do not function through the Trade Union, but who could join the Labour Party and be a great source of strength to the political wing of the workers' Movement.

A great welcome awaits these—your members' wives and families—and if your branch would interest itself in the matter by devoting a few minutes to a discussion of this question we ourselves should not only be obliged, but we are sure it would result in some endeavours to send us a list of possible members. May we ask you to do this, and also assure you in advance of the appreciation and thanks that would be due to you from the above organisation.

Yours sincerely,

A. BRAINWORKER,
Secretary.

Letter to a New Member

DEAR FRIEND,

We have been glad to receive your application for membership of the Labour Party.

In entering this great Movement you have joined hands with the only Party of the people; you have entered into what is really a fellowship and holy alliance of hundreds of thousands of your fellow-countrymen banded together for social justice. All these are determined that in any Reconstruction after the war, we shall secure for the people their full social and economic freedom and give to the worker by hand and brain his full reward, and a place in society and industry which he has never before occupied.

These may appear but empty phrases, but as you attend our meetings and read our literature and proposals, you will find our policy amplified and laid out in detail, and you can share in moulding it, for there are yet many problems of the after war period to be studied and solved by our growing ranks.

In due course you will receive invitations to our business meetings. You yourself can help to make these attractive and effective, and it is the sincere wish of our Party that you will co-operate in our efforts to the fullest degree possible.

Yours sincerely,

A. BRAINWORKER,
Secretary.

An Example Training Prospective Councillors

We gather from the journal of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers that an interesting experiment has been started by Newcastle-on-Tyne City Labour Party which aims at preparing members to take their places on local Government authorities fully armed with essential knowledge on the carrying out of their duties.

This journal says:—

"When a member of a Local Labour Party aspires to council or municipal honours it is generally assumed that he has, through his experience of party activities, gained some insight into the working of his local authority. Should he top the poll at his first fight he is soon made to realise that his knowledge of local government is, to say the least, very elementary, and the advice given him by the older members is to sit tight until he finds his feet.

"'Finding your feet' on a local authority depends on the size of the authority and the ability of the man with the feet. It is no easy matter, as many will testify who have gone through the mill. An interesting experiment is being tried this winter in Newcastle-on-Tyne.

A panel of municipal candidates has been set up which will meet any eventuality which may arrive in the way of elections. There is a candidate to fill every ward in the city should the powers that be decide on a general election of councillors. Each candidate was nominated by his organisation and a questionnaire had to be completed giving all the necessary information. This was considered by the Executive Committee, and every candidate was interviewed and voted on by ballot.

"Next step decided upon was the setting up of a Local Government class to be tutored by a specialist in that subject. This will cover twelve lessons. The first two lessons will deal with local government from a general point of view; the next two will be dealt with by the leader of the Labour Group on the council and he will deal with local government generally as it affects the city. The following eight will cover such subjects as Watch Committee,

Finance, Town Improvements, Health, Education, Public Assistance, Transport and Housing.

"At each of these last eight lectures an invited Labour councillor will be present who will be a member of one of the above committees. He will be present on invitation to give local colour to the discussions on the various subjects selected.

"This experiment should, given the goodwill of all concerned, prove of estimable value to would-be councillors, and will probably prove a feather in the cap of the party if we can say that our candidates have studied their subjects at the local "King's College."

WEST LEYTON

We have before us No. 21 of the West Leyton D.L.P. Members' Bulletin, which for the first time appears in printed form. It is a foolscap, printed both sides, of which 1,000 copies were printed for the use of members and selected sympathisers. It is the intention to use the printed bulletin for this special use as occasion offers, or rather as finance dictates, and to continue the duplicated issue for the months where the printed copies would be inconvenient. We suppose the Party hope to gradually develop their paper as a regular printed sheet. It is surprising what a lot of useful information and propaganda work can be crowded into a publication of this size, although if folded and made up into four sheets appearance would be improved. We note that this Party are interested to secure a recommencement of the publication of the Co-operative "Citizen"—which paper did such good work in a large number of constituencies until suspended owing to war circumstances.

(Concluded from page 4)

Llanelli shows pluck. One of the members, a young lady, spoke before an audience of 800 on "Youth Day." The League has been busy on recruiting plans for its own membership. They have also decided on a dramatic group.

Streatham has 60 members on the book over 16 years of age and a number between 14 and 16. At Port Talbot, as in other places where calling up has affected the membership, the League is making a drive for young people from 14 years upwards. There appears to be a general tendency to do this. Adversity, therefore, only serves in some places to point new methods and encourage better plans.

*By the Editor**The Ghost of Great Oak Hall*

The Wanderlust

No. 14

There were adders in Great Oak wood. At least, folk said so, though others swore the last was killed nigh forty years ago. Yet all agreed that a adder owned it: to wit, one George Spiers, lord of the manor of Great Oak and Tremble Tree. His venom all men feared, for his bite was deadly, and his pity nil.

In all the countryside no man was better hated than Squire Spiers. Descendant of a long line of squires, he lived alone, save for his daughter, Rosetta, in the Great Oak Hall—a square three-storied building which stood, gaunt and bare, some hundred-and-fifty yards away from the farm buildings.

What George Spiers had done to alienate the countryside would fill a chapter. Certainly, he had oppressed his tenants, sold up cottagers, foreclosed on mortgages, tyrannised over his labourers, blocked up footpaths, and prosecuted poachers. He had also laid claim to a part of God's acre, the which he had threatened to plough up, and scatter the bones to manure his fields. George Spiers had had not a few bouts at law, wherein he had invariably been successful, that is, until his last and biggest suit, which had brought him a cropper, and reduced his estate to the home farm itself.

The squire had, of course, been married, but there were ugly rumours about his wife, Tilly Beavers, his junior by twenty-two years, had married him at nineteen. They had had one daughter, and then —. Well, nobody knew just what happened then. Tilly had disappeared—"run away" George said, "and good riddance!" Few people accepted that, but then nobody knew any better. George just lived on at the Hall with Rosetta.

The woman who tended Rosetta had long since ceased to visit the hall—scared away, people said. For some years the squire tended his daughter himself, serving her in everything. He never ate with her, but put aside

prodigious quantities for himself. As she grew up Spiers now bought toys and clothes in abundance, and later, dogs and horses. But Rosetta for all that was a prisoner; her gilded cage being the ground floor rooms, the paddock, and, at rare intervals, the confines of the farm with her father as companion.

* * *

It was in the year 19—that Rosetta with her horsemanship, her dainty figure (she was eighteen now), her pretty, but serious and wistful face, began to attract the distant attention of the male youth of the neighbourhood. And, of course, as she was talked of, the fifteen-year-old stories about her mother were revived—the disagreements up at the Hall and Tilly's final disappearance. Great Oak Hall was now said to be haunted, while some said they had seen Tilly's figure at the windows, beckoning as if to call the belated traveller. Wise folk put two and two together and pointed to Rosetta. Others, who believed in ghosts looked mysterious and avowed that Tilly's spirit had come back to haunt the old Hall.

Although Rosetta now for the first time in her life rode through the village street, and even stopped at the boot-maker's, the aforesaid male youth (or youths) got no thrills, or anyway, no opportunities, out of this. The "squire," big, black-bearded, with his cropper always handy, saw to this.

Nor did sneaking round the hall of a summer's evening, or stray visits on "meet" days, accomplish anything, though both were tried by the lads. The hall, as stated, was a prison, almost a fortress. There was no approach to the house, save through the paddock twixt the farm buildings and the hall, and here the bull or successive bulls, had been kept for years out of memory. And when Rosetta strayed beyond these boundaries, father always went, too.

You have heard of strange flowers blooming in an alien land; of homely

plants on a high-up rock-face, of rare ferns in disused pit shafts, of fish in pools far from other waters. How did they get there? And who or what ordains that the solitaries of the wild plant or beast shall meet their mate through the vastness or over the obstacles? Old Nature always triumphs, doesn't she? And what is one squire, anyway?

So it was that despite the squire and prison barriers, the rose among the prickly thorns was not to bloom alone. Nature triumphed once again in the person of Ronnie Bee.

* * *

Ronnie's first introduction was a bold affair. He was strolling one evening near the Hall (prowling the squire would have called it) when the signal others had seen came from an upper window—pale face and beckoning hand. Rosetta, concluded Ronnie, and in distress, Ronnie waved, and risking everything he cleared the paddock before the bull was aware of his purpose. He arrived at a back door before the dogs, who had never known an intruder, woke up. Ronnie knocked boldly, but it was a pale, trembling Rosetta who answered. She paled further as he confusedly explained himself.

It was lucky for Ronnie the Squire was out—exceptionally lucky, because Rosetta, after a few hasty and scared sentences calmed down and seemed inclined to talk.

Ronnie's reactions to the situation in which he found himself, and Rosetta's own responses, soon showed this was a case of love at first sight. The cynic might say that in the given circumstances that was inevitable; just as inevitable as the fall of Adam. Be that as it may, love ripened magically, like a tropic plant, as they talked. Rich, ripe, warm young blood welled up in fierce passionate kisses ere Ronnie went. And before they parted, they drew up, and carried, a programme of future meetings.

* * *

And now I must devote all the space to the next asterisks to Rosetta; except to explain in passing that Ronnie was a farmer's son, a loyal lad, and every inch, and in every sense, a gentleman.

Rosetta had been, throughout her life, a trustful child. The great hall had several rooms on each floor, but the whole of the upper floors were

boarded off. Rosetta had never been upstairs. Her father sometimes went because she heard him tramping there. If Rosetta thought this strange she never said so, but of late years Rosetta had developed that wistful look. No wonder: for now she had begun to puzzle. She wasn't happy, and there was an unreality about her life that made her afraid.

Rosetta's first stolen meeting with Ronnie away from the hall resulted in conversation about that signal he had seen. Rosetta's statement that she never went upstairs puzzled him. He knew the story about the hall being haunted and laughingly burst out with it. He was sorry he did so. Rosetta became serious and there was a flat ending to this first meeting.

Had Ronnie known he had given Rosetta a serious shock. She herself once thought she had seen a face at an upper window, but she had laughed at it as a stupid fancy. Ronnie, on being pressed, had also told her about her mother and what folks said.

Rosetta was serious all that night. So, she considered, the hall was haunted; and she had been alone in it many many times! She shuddered.

She recalled now muffled, unexplainable noises—the ghost! She recalled more than one unearthly screech she had heard at night—a chimney cowl or a loose shutter, she had thought—but was it, after all, a spirit? Please do not smile. Rosetta was eighteen, a dangerous wonderful age, when a girl peeps forward into a new and unexpected world. Were spirits in it, too? Rosetta cowered in her bed and listened.

* * *

Poor Ronnie. When one is madly in love and the girl goes flat, it is exasperating. But true love has patience, despite the evidence of half the poets. Ronnie waited for the next appointed meeting. It didn't mature; nor the next. But the third did, with explanations of the Squire's watchfulness. It was a passionate meeting and what wonder? This time Rosetta opened the conversation about the ghost. She begged Ronnie to take her away. He promised, and they laid plans for an elopement on Christmas Eve, when Squire always went to an Old Boys' dinner in the county town. With that settled Rosetta was more at ease, but it was only with difficulty that Ronnie

got her to go back to the Hall to face several nights of terror.

* * *

It would be nice to close this story with an account of love triumphant; of a Squire rampant; and of an elopement successfully carried through. But did ever love disentangle itself so freely? Had it done so the history of the world would read differently, and you and I might not be in it.

But to resume. Men and maids propose, but it is given to another to dispose. Here the Squire "disposed." He stayed at home; and so, of course, did Rosetta.

It is probable that never in its history had the square old hall been so beset as during that next week. Ronnie had made friends with the bull and night after night he paced the paddock round and round. He saw no Rosetta, and knowing the Squire was at home he dared not approach the hall. But he got his share of frights; for on three successive nights he saw the phantom at the window. Once there was borne on the winter wind a cry of Hi-hi-hi—and Ronnie ran, to pull up at the thought of Rosetta, and come back to resume his vigil.

Those last nights of the old year were torture to Ronnie. It was as he had made up his mind to seek help and force an entrance to the hall that Ronnie had a final shock. As he stood beneath a downstairs window the flickering firelight plainly threw a shadow on the blind—a woman's shadow, followed by an awful groan. At that moment too came a shriek from above and that call, Hi-hi-hi. It was too much for Ronnie. He turned and ran, and half-looking back caught sight again of the beckoning arm and ghostly face above. Ronnie doubled his speed.

'Twas New Year's Eve at the Barley Brew and by grace of the usual extension a great company had gathered to see the New Year in. The dying year had, since opening time, been cheered with song and wassail, with carousing and with carol, and now in the last hour a hush descended and men talked.

Soon the haunted Hall came into the conversation; what some had seen, or thought they saw; what Ronnie had told his father. Men nodded their heads, not from the mead they had drunk, but because of murder, dark and ghastly, because of a haunting spirit, unrested and unavenged. In

the silence the bubbling of an emptying bottle froze their marrows; it sounded like—ah, never mind.

It was into this scene that Ronnie dashed looking for his father. In a moment he told his tale and all was excitement. 'Twas old John Bee himself who finally asked for volunteers to visit the hall that very night, to tear its secrets and its timbers, till the ghost was laid, and old Spiers answered what would be put to him.

That night will not soon be forgotten. Every man jack was a volunteer. The company assembled outside, some with sticks, some with pitchforks and the village butcher with his poleaxe.

There were twenty-two all told and they set out with half-an-hour of the old year to go, and a mile to the hall. The trail led by Great Oak wood and down an unused lane, and as the hall came in sight with lights burning in several rooms the company halted. That sight had not been seen for years, nor was it real, they said. The timid were for turning back and the bull now appeared at the fence to bar further progress. The poleaxe neatly settled that problem and now with a shout and half a cheer the gallant twenty-two dashed on to storm the hall.

* * *

Let us return to Rosetta. On the day Squire Spiers was to have gone to his old boys' dinner, he had, spotted Ronnie, far too early for his appointment, lurking down the leafless lane. He taxed Rosetta and there was a terrific row. That night the squire began to drink.

Next day and on succeeding days he drank still more, and one day Rosetta heard him overhead cursing and storming either to himself or at the ghost. When at last he came back through the door in the boarded stairway he was in a terrible passion. He seized an old sword trophy that hung in the hall and essayed to go upstairs again. But this time Mother Nature (who protects ghosts as well as you and me) intervened. George Spiers fell prostrate, with a seizure.

Now Rosetta had her hands full. It was New Year's Eve. She had strength and knowledge only sufficient to put cushions under her father where he lay. Then she perceived the open door and stairway. She ran to close it, but prompted by some strange instinct she stepped inside the barrier and listened.

For some time Rosetta stood motionless. She then crept forward till a

sound upstairs almost stayed her heart. It was a long-drawn wail, but not so ghostly as not to have been a human one.

Rosetta darted back. She didn't lack courage; picking up the sword and keys her father had dropped she went to lock the door. Curiosity overcame her and she stepped inside again. Once more she heard that weird wail, and now a thumping noise from the top of the house.

With a pluck born of desperation Rosetta mounted the dusty stairway, and at last stood outside a doorway from which the sounds came. One more wail and she threw open the door and stood sword in hand, in the open doorway.

May the Fates forbid that you or I behold such a sight as met her gaze—a woman chained to a beam—a woman in faded finery, with food on the floor and a travel by the chain, perhaps, as far as the window on one side, and the bed on the floor on the other.

That poor wretch she knew instantly for her mother.

* * *

I have no room for further explanations nor to describe, if I could, that tragic meeting. Nor need I tell you of the release, the carrying of her mother down the stairs, the bathing, the dressing, and the putting to bed in her own bed that wreck of what had once been the prettiest bride in the county.

* * *

And now with lights lit and fires burning Rosetta sat by the side of the bed. And the old year died and a new one dawned for both.

Hark! A turmoil outside. A turmoil inside, too. Many men are coming. They burst in. They fall back aghast.

There are explanations and more explanations. They go to look for the Squire. They find him—dead: "and damned," says he, with the dripping poleaxe.

Now in the throng an upstanding fair-faced lad stands out. Rosetta goes over to him. She leads him to the bed. She said simply, "Mother. This is Ronnie."

There danced a smile in the eyes of the long-lost mistress of Great Oak Hall; and it remained there, while twenty-one men filed out and home, with much commotion and the song of many carols.

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The London Labour Party continues to be active in providing Labour Party education and propaganda. Early this year it carried through a successful course of free weekly lectures in Central London.

It has just announced a further series of ten lectures to be held at Essex Hall, Essex Street, Strand, on successive Saturdays, commencing on January 10, 1942. All of the lectures will deal with the Planning of the Post-War World.

Mr. G. D. H. Cole, M.A., will start the course with a lecture on January 10 entitled "Back to Work: Demobilisation and the Re-Employment of Labour." Other lecturers in the series will include Mr. Arthur Greenwood, M.P., Mr. Herbert Morrison, M.P., Professor Lancelot Hogben, Mr. John Wilmot, M.P., Mr. Francis Williams, and Mr. Harold Butler.

Each lecture will begin at 2.30 p.m., and those attending will be able to get home before dark. Admission will be free, but there will be a few reserved seats for which tickets, price 6d., can be obtained from the London Labour Party, 258/262 Westminster Bridge Road, London, S.E.1.

FILM NEWS

Sometimes Labour can take a lesson from its sister movement. Here is one which has been contributed to us:—

The Education Committee of the Chelmsford Star Society have been endeavouring to devise ways and means of interesting the public in their educational work. They found that the ordinary educational facilities provided by Co-operative Societies were not making a very great appeal, so they decided to operate an experiment.

They picked out three subjects of interest to Co-operators and they arranged that these subjects should be illustrated by films. They invited the Workers' Film Association to provide projection equipment and films, and Alderman Joseph Reeves to deliver the lectures.

They are quite satisfied that this new method is one which has come to stay. At the opening evening, Mr. Reeves delivered a lecture on "Co-operation in the Soviet Union" and illustrated it, as he has done on many occasions recently, with a screening of Eisenstein's famous co-operative film, "The General Line."

On the following day, Mr. Reeves lectured on "Co-operation in the post-war world." The lecture was illustrated by a film in which A. V. Alexander appealed to the workers to defend Democracy. It is entitled "Advance Democracy." This was followed by the C.W.S. film "The Machine Is Mastered," which shows how machinery under democratic control can be a blessing and not a curse. Then came a screening of "Millions Of Us," an American film showing the horrors of unemployment. A very lively discussion followed the lecture and film show.

On the third day, Mr. Reeves spoke on "Education and the Film." He showed how films could be a very helpful adjunct to class-room technique, how the visual aid had, as a result of many Government Commissions of investigation, proved its value as an educational medium. People learnt more through sight than through any other of their senses. The success of the cinema had come about because people enjoyed seeing action of all types. Children who had been taught

with the film as an auxiliary aid, advanced much more rapidly than children who had not been provided with film education. He illustrated his talk by a number of films such as "Children at School," "Men of the Alps," "The Four Barriers" and "Cornwall the West Land." They were all very much appreciated and the consensus of opinion was that if education could only be linked up with the films in this way, it could be not only much more effective for the education of the child, but the adult would benefit and would respond far more rapidly to appeals of education and propaganda.

Bedford Federation Help the "L.O."

Mr. W. M. Kempster, J.P., C.C., Secretary of the Bedford Federation of Labour Parties, sent us the following interesting item concerning literature distribution:—

"Meetings are very irregular and sparsely attended nowadays. People do not care to get outside their houses during the black-out."

"In order to get to the other side of the closed doors the Bedford Divisional Labour Party has just distributed 400 Labour Party Bulletins for November. Half of this number have been posted to Labour supporters in the country villages. Costly? Yes, at 1d. postage on each, but not so costly as meetings."

"The Beds. Federation have also broadcast by post 400 November copies."

Incidentally we have to express our gratitude to Mr. Kempster for publicity given to the "Labour Organiser" at the recent Bedfordshire County Conference. Now the Bedford Federation has followed this up by a circular urging the purchase of this paper. We quote:—

"Every Labour worker will be the better for reading this monthly."

"The majority of the Bedford D.L.P. executive subscribe for, and recommend, the 'Labour Organiser' to their Labour comrades throughout the County of Bedford."

"I hope to hear that you and your Committee have decided to support the 'Labour Organiser.'"

We should be grateful if other Federations would copy this example.

In another circular this Federation draws attention to the possibilities of leaflet or pamphlet distribution, and puts a sound proposition as to steady and systematic distribution of small quantities each week. It is surprising how much good can be done in this way.

General Election Enquiry

Mr. Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary, has appointed a Government Committee to enquire into post-war problems of election machinery. The probability of this being done was exclusively announced in our issue of a month ago.

Labour representatives will be Mr. G. R. Shepherd (National Agent), Mr. W. G. Hall, M.P., and Mr. Garro-Jones, M.P. There will be representatives also of the other political parties and certain permanent officials will be attached to the Committee.

It is not yet certain how far the Committee will go in the examination of far-reaching changes, but in any case it is probable that the Committee will first apply itself to immediate problems and the formulation of a plan for taking a General Election should that become necessary before any wider changes are made.

N.C.L.C.

The National Council of Labour Colleges in a circular to Labour Party secretaries draws attention to the fact that the limitation of normal activities of local parties due to the circumstances of the war affords a unique opportunity for parties to harness their energies to the educational facilities afforded by the N.C.L.C. Parties are asked to consider the possibility of starting a class under N.C.L.C. auspices, or if that is not possible to start a study circle. Speakers will be sent, on application, to explain the aims, objects and methods of working of the N.C.L.C. and it is pointed out that many Labour Party members are entitled to free postal courses as a result of their own Trade Union affiliation to the N.C.L.C. which, by-the-way, is the only Labour educational organisation of any size in this country.

By-the-way, a cheap reprint of "A History of British Socialism," by Max Beard, is now available and a special N.C.L.C. edition has been issued at only 5/- per copy as against the previous published price of 12s. 6d. Three copies of this book, which consists of nearly 500 pages, may be obtained for 15/- post free, cash with order.

An announcement will appear next month regarding future wholesale prices for the "L.O." There will be no increase on orders received in the interim.